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Low-Income Renters Ousted For Condos

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Time runs out today for three of the five tenants left at Seabright Terrace apartments and the last two, the English lady and her dog "Callahan," have to get out by the end of the month.

They say they've got no place to go and they feel they've been duped by City Hall and the developers who are going to demolish the old apartments.

While Seabright Terrace is no man's Mark Hopkins, it has given a lot of the young and the poor a place to live in Santa Cruz and it has given sanctuary to many young mothers and their children.

The lady with the dog, Faye Phillips, says, "It became like a little Shangrila with these little naked kids running around brown in the sun."

Tenant Pam Defee says, "Socially, it was like a family here and now the wealthy have broken the family apart."

Developers Thacher and Thompson say what they are doing is replacing "the old barracks-like converted motel (and) the two houses and garage behind it" with "a group of six houses that are architecturally integrated into the existing neighborhood, while the run-down, overly-dense substandard housing is replaced."

The result will be that "we will restore the 'distinctive small-scale residential flavor' of the Seabright area on an unpleasant corner of the neighborhood, while preserving housing opportunities for the community." The interior quotation comes from the Seabright area plan.

The housing opportunity offered by Thacher and Thompson is that the six expensive condos near the ocean (off Seabright Avenue, along Atlantic) will all have studio apartments downstairs that must be rented to low income people.

Tenant Kathy McCrea points out that equates to six studio rentals replacing 19 low-cost unit rentals.

Other tenants noted that isn't the direction that local planning, the Coastal Act and recent Sacramento legislation says should be taken.

Nevertheless, the project was approved in February and March by the city Zoning Board with conditions that the developers assist the tenants in relocating.

That assistance includes reimbursement for one month's rent and \$150 moving costs, according to McCrea. Project co-owner Don Mele doesn't contest that.

However, Mele told The Sentinel that the relocation assistance money won't be paid until all permits are obtained for the project and the building permits haven't been taken yet.

He says he expects the relocation money will come down around the "first of the month."

McCrea points out that means the tenants have had to come up with the moving money out of their pockets. She also says that the developer's option that tenants have the first right to rent to studio apartments doesn't mean much because the tenants are getting spread all over.

The remaining condition on the developers that they pay the county Housing Authority \$90,000 for development of future low-cost housing "doesn't do us one damned bit of good," say the existing tenants.

Mele points out, "We have done more to compensate for the loss of low-cost housing than any other developer has been required to do."

Planning Commissioner and Zoning Board member Richard Rahders is also an official with Thacher and Thompson and he properly stepped down when the project came up for hearing.

However, a vote by Rahders on upzoning the property as part of bringing the Seabright area into conformance with the general plan and coastal plan has been criticized.

He says the criticism is totally unfair as his company's interest is in the project and not the property and the project has been approved in his absence from the board.

He says he favored the upzoning in the Seabright area because increased density is one of the necessary planning tools to bring about more low-cost housing.

The last five tenants occupy three units. McCrea and Deffee in one, Phillips and Callahan in another and a man who said he didn't want to be publicly identified in the third.

McCrea said she will have to store her goods until she finds a place to live and that she can't get to the storage until Monday.

"It means I'll have to get a truck someplace and then keep my stuff in the truck Sunday night while I find someplace to stay and then store it Monday," she said.

Phillips says, "I'm just going out of my mind."

Instead of the relocation money she took the offer to have the developers pay for a rental agency to find her a place to stay.

"They only found one place for \$550 a month at New Brighton and they don't take dogs."

Looking at her big, black, clumsy dog, she says with affection, "Where I go, he goes."

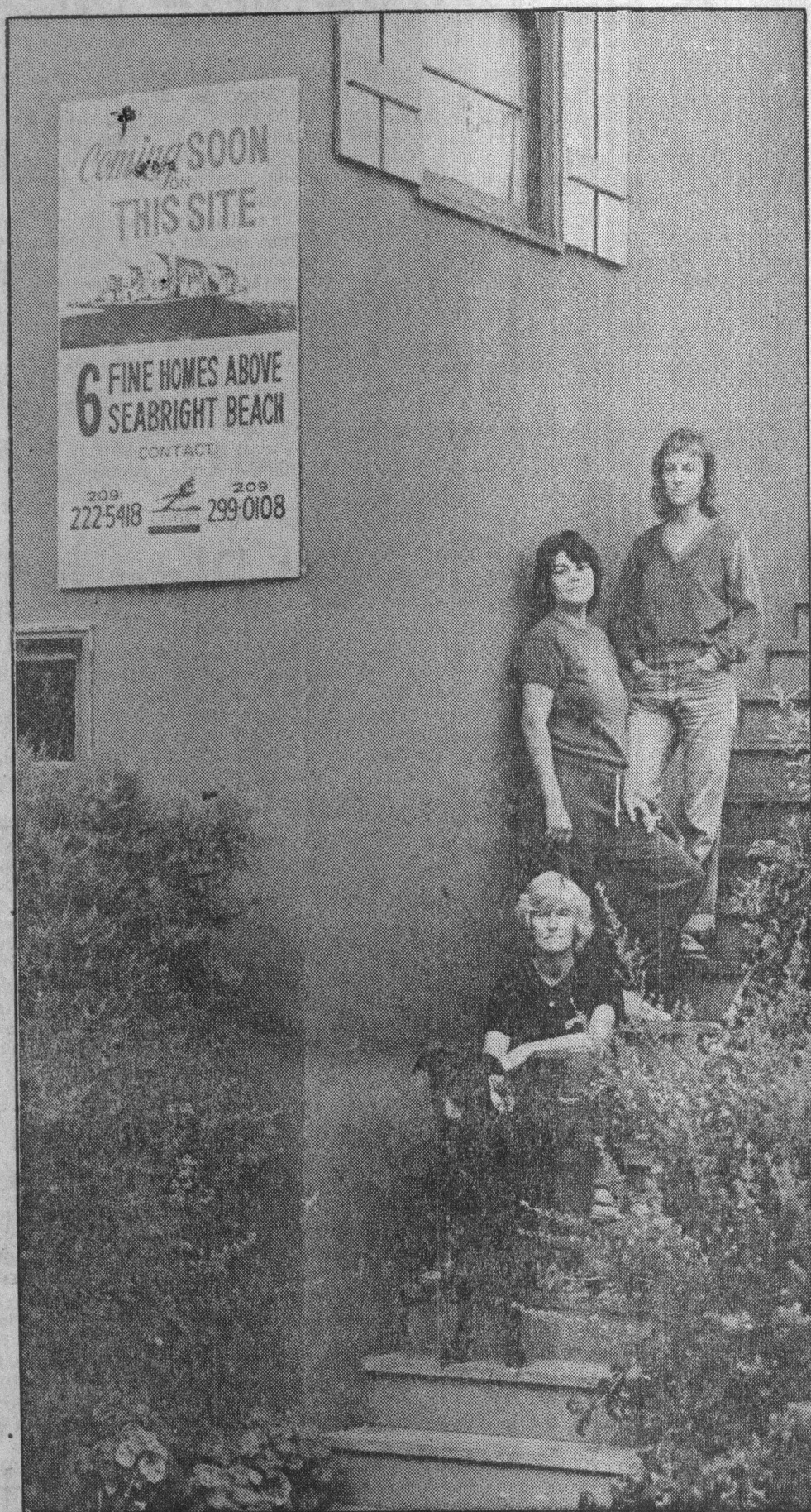
She was asked why the tenants didn't appeal the zoning board's decision to the City Council, where the liberal majority might have had a more sympathetic ear for the tenants' plight.

"Nobody knew what to do. They asked the tenants to sign agreements before the board meeting and afterwards nobody appealed," Phillips says.

McCrea says, "Maybe it's just the wave of the future. We thought we were getting the best deal we could get."

Councilmember Mardi Wormhoudt responded, but she could only get in a six-months' moratorium on demolitions while a demolition ordinance is being written since the project already had been approved.

That too, is too late for the two young women, the cautious man and the English lady and dog Callahan.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Pam Deffee, Kathy McCrea, Faye Phillips
And Callahan are victims of progress